

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council
News Update
November, 2002

South Parish Burying Ground

A proposal was set forth by the Newton Historical Commission to apply for Community Preservation funds to restore the three historic burying grounds in Newton. Within the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council service area lies the South Burying Ground, which is on the northern end of Winchester Street between Needham Street and Route 9, next to the National Lumber store. According to Joseph Dwyer, a Newton Highlands resident, the South Burying Ground was established in 1803 and continued in use for about a century, with the last burial possibly taking place there in 1917.

The application is for funds for repairs to the cemetery labeled as "urgent", including pruning of dead trees that pose a hazard to visitors and could damage stones, urgently needed preservation of stones, and repairs of structural damage to tombs. Apparently, this first stage of work was drafted as part of a "master plan" that was created in 1989-1990. This work will allow greater access to the public and also access to the physically handicapped to the South Burying Ground.

The Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council supports the idea that the preservation and improvement of such a public area near to our village center would be an advantage to the Highlands. The following letter was submitted by the NHNAC to the Newton Historical Commission in support of their application for Community Preservation funds for this project.

November 1, 2002

Community Preservation Committee
c/o Newton Planning and Development Department
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Sirs:

This letter is in support of the application of the Newton Historical Society for funds for needed repairs at the three historic parish burial grounds. It is my understanding that this initial request is for work originally marked urgent in the 1989-90 master plan. This includes tree work (e.g., removing dead trees that pose a hazard to visitors and could damage the tombstones), stone conservation to preserve the historic stones, and repair of structural damage to tombs that currently also poses a hazard to visitors. Ultimately the goal of this project is both to preserve these historic areas and to give greater access to the public. This includes access for the physically handicapped. The latter is perhaps especially relevant to Newton Highlands, in view of the handicapped housing in the former Hyde School that is only about half a dozen blocks from the South Parish Burial Ground on Winchester Street.

This project easily fulfills two of the three objectives of the community preservation funds: historic

preservation and preservation of open space. At a time when our modern lives are so hectic, these historic burial grounds could provide important islands of brief refuge for the residents of Newton. There is the link to the past that helps ground us—I remember the excitement of my children looking at such old tombstones and thinking about the lives of the people recorded on them. These tombstones are historic documents, but placed outside. And there is the pause for quiet contemplation and reflection that often comes from visiting such a place. The South Parish Burial Ground sits between the business areas of Newton Highlands and those of Needham Street. A new residential complex for hundreds of people is currently under construction a short distance down Needham Street. The burial ground could thus become important public open space if the repairs and improvements are made to allow safety and access. The East and West Parish Burial Grounds should be similar resources in the north of the city.

Sincerely yours,

Keith Tornheim
Co-president, NHNAC

Crystal Lake Docks Repair

The Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council was contacted by Carol Stapleton asking for support for building new docks, along with other improvements, at Crystal Lake. The present docks date from 1985 and are in need of updating. In addition, the bathrooms at the bathhouse need repairs and there is an issue with erosion of the public bathing area at Crystal Lake, mainly due to erosion caused by water pouring down from the sloped parking lot.

The Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council feels that this swimming and recreation area is not only an important resource for the entire city, but especially for the residents of the Highlands. Although perennial issues regarding parking remain unresolved, the NHHAC is fully in favor of the upkeep of the Crystal Lake public resource. The following letter was sent by the Council to Fran Towle, Newton's Commissioner of Parks and Recreation.

From: Keith Tornheim <tornheim@bu.edu>
To: ftowle@ci.newton.ma.us
Subject: Crystal Lake repairs & new docks
Date: Friday, November 01, 2002 1:28 PM

To: Fran Towle, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation

From: Keith Tornheim, Co-president, Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Date: November 1, 2002

Re: Crystal Lake repairs & new docks

Dear Fran,

I have been talking with Carol Stapleton about the proposed repairs at Crystal Lake, including fixing the bathrooms, handling erosion and the need for new docks. I certainly feel that this facility is an important recreational resource for Newton residents as a whole, and this is especially true for residents of Newton Highlands, as we live closest to it. I do not have all the details, but I can understand that the current 17-year-old docks are getting splintery and that this is an obvious hazard and they should be replaced. Similarly, the enjoyment of a time at the beach can be strongly affected by questionable bathroom facilities.

Erosion has always been a problem at that site and nearby Levingston Cove--I can certainly see that water cutting through from the sloped parking lot and aimed at the bathhouse and the beach could be very problematic. I support your efforts at maintaining this facility in suitable, safe condition so that it is a pleasure for the many, many residents who use it. I also want to take this opportunity thank Carol Stapleton for her management and for working with us all these years.

The one caveat I should mention (re: the devil is in the details) is that while we are of course very supportive of repairs/improvements like these in the general sense to maintain the facility, it would be good if you could let us and the neighborhood (and perhaps other members of the public) see what changes are actually planned or what the options are. I am sure we all remember all the commotion surrounding the recent changes at Levingston Cove, where some of the problems could have been handled with better communication and less assumption about what people would like. Ultimately, except for clear safety issues and legal constraints, the opinions and desires of the users (and viewers) should be given high weight.

Sincerely yours,

Keith Tornheim
Co-President, Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council